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JOINING FORCES FOR RURAL IMPROVEMENT

U. S. Department of Agriculture

A radio talk by Florence Ward, Regional Agent, Extension Service, United States Department of Agriculture, delivered Wednesday, July 20, 1932, in the Land-Grant College radio program, broadcast by a network of 47 associate NBC radio stations.

Friends, the radio has made neighbors of us all. It is helping us to work together to overcome our present difficulties and make farm and city life approach our ideal.

Crossing the Mall this morning I stopped to view the administration building of the Department of Agriculture. I read the words of Lincoln chiseled deep in marble above the entrance: "No other occupation" says Lincoln, "opens so wide a field for profitable and agreeable combination of labor and cultivated thought as agriculture." What a fulfillment there has been of these prophetic words. Most of the discoveries made by science since Lincoln's time have contributed to open wider the field of agriculture. The practical applications of these researches to every-day practices are carried to the farming people by the Extension Service, which is the clearing house for the research work of the Land-Grant Colleges, and the Department of Agriculture.

Compare the life of the pioneer farmer of Lincoln's time with the life of the average farmer of today. A hard-surfaced road passes his door. Rural mail delivery brings the daily paper. The telephone and radio bring him in touch with the outside world and keep his mind alert. Labor saving machinery means less drudgery, shorter hours, and time for enjoyment. The rural libraries provide good books. National agencies of health and education are giving equal opportunity for country and city children in many communities.

Truly, farm life has many compensations. There is little cash to be sure, but the three great essentials are there: Food, shelter, and a healthful atmosphere.

We have the joining habit in America and are proud of it. Every great forward step in our national life has been taken through joining forces in united effort. Traditionally known as an individualist, the farmer is rapidly and eagerly becoming a partner and cooperator. Farmers have been slower than city people to organize, but in recent years they have been joining forces for mutual benefit, in producing, and marketing what they grow. While the farmer is at work, his farm organization is voicing his needs in Washington.

Rural America is today like a great university, with its campus extending to woodlot, field, kitchen, garden, and living room. Its courses deal with simple, every-day practices based upon the best scientific information. Standards of farming and homemaking are being raised, as the farmer leaders of their own organization plan their programs and their activities. The leaven in all this united effort among farming people for the improvement of their economic and social life is the work of the extension agent in the county.

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Extension Work is built around the improvement of agriculture and the rural home, with emphasis upon the economic and practical side of farm life. Farmers are participating in county-wide, state-wide, and regional conferences, which are accomplishing most helpful results.

For instance, Franklin County, Vermont, brought the majority of the farm families together at the Court House for a series of conferences. They considered their problems. They set up a five-year program, and now they are carrying it forward with zest.

The farmers of North Carolina assisted by the Extension Service and backed by the Governor, set up a "live-at-home" program. Already this program has saved the State large sums of money, because families have produced on the farm for home use many things which they formerly bought.

Eleven of the Western States organized a livestock conference and are now in the midst of a five-year program, which resulted from this meeting.

Farm families to-day are joining forces with others from the community and county, and with scientific advisors, in studying with them the problems of the day, and in joining with them in a mass attack upon those problems which can not be dealt with single-handed. To my mind, it means real progress in rural improvement.